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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed college students' use of motivational strategies in academic contexts. Participants included 11 male and 26 female undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at an urban university, who completed the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire. Analysis focused primarily on responses to the following sample items: "How well I do in this course will depend on how hard I try," and "It is my own fault if I do not do well in this course." Results showed a significant difference between males and females concerning their attributions of success with female students more likely than males to attribute academic success to their own efforts. There were no significant gender differences concerning their attributions of failure. Results suggest that increased use of male/female/student/mentor programs might enable one gender to acquire benefits from the other in academic endeavors. (CH)

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Gender Differences in the Attribution of Internal Success among College Students

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Abstract

This study involved the analyses of control beliefs between male and female undergraduate students in an urban university using the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). The responses to items on the attribution of their internal success turned out to be bearing of a notable gender difference. The implications summon scholastic attention and give way to certain achievement promoting suggestions.

Introduction

This study focuses on the attribution of college students' control beliefs (i.e., internal success and internal failure) pertaining to their use of motivational strategies in academic contexts. Literature points out that control beliefs (i.e., locus of control) is a salient factor influencing academic achievement and, in turn, personal academic achievement is largely perceived as a key factor affecting the causal attribution of a learner's successes and failures. The suggestions this study provides may be a stepping stone for developing ways of improving classroom teaching strategies and enhancing students' use of motivational strategies for learning.

Methodology

Participants were 37 undergraduate students (11 males, 26 females) enrolled in psychology courses. They were given bonus points towards their final grades for the course upon their completion of the experiment which involved the administration of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ).

The MSLQ is a self-report instrument designed to assess college students' motivational orientations and their use of different learning strategies (McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, & Smith, 1986). It is a 6-page questionnaire containing 20 different subscales pertaining to cognitive and motivational strategies in academic learning. The items were in Likert-form scale of 1 to 5, (1 = not at all true of me, and 5 = very true of me). The questions analyzed primarily focused on the participants' responses to the following sample items: (See next page.)

Internal: Success

How well I do in this course will depend on how hard I try.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

definitely no definitely yes

Internal: Failure

It is my own fault if I do not do well in this course.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

definitely no definitely yes

Results

Of the several motivational subscales of the MSLQ, gender differences in the means for the internal success subscale was most apparent (See Figure 1). A significant difference between male internal success and female internal success was found but interestingly, there was no significant gender difference in internal failure.

internal success:

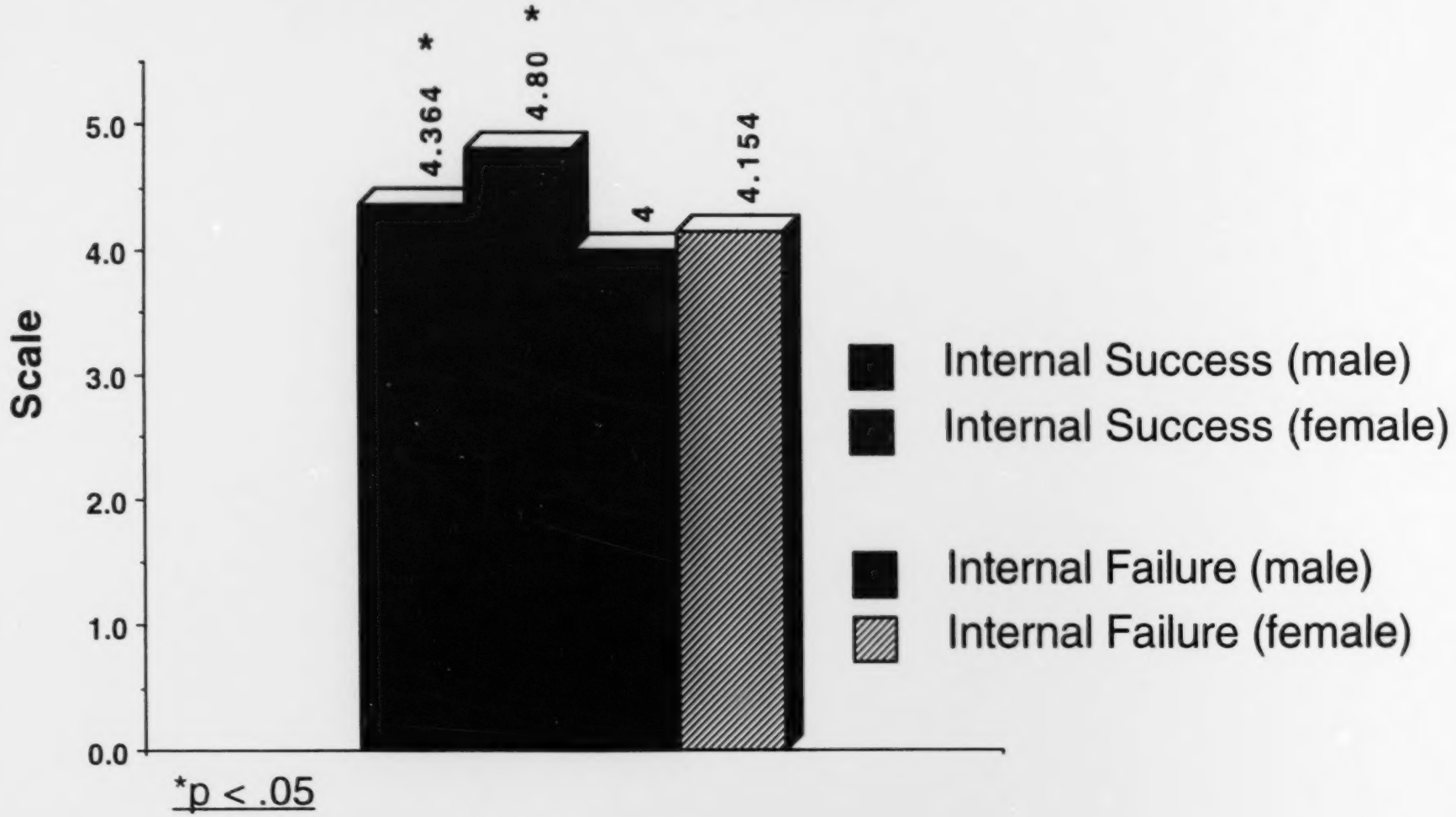
	MeanDiff.	df	T-Value	p-value*
M, F	-.44	35	-2.245	.0312

internal failure:

	MeanDiff.	df	T-Value	p-value
M, F	-.154	35	-0.393	.6964

Table 1. T-test analysis of mean differences between male and female learners on internal success and internal failure.

Figure 1. Bar graph of gender differences for internal success and internal failure measures



*p < .05

Implications

As you can see from Table 1 and Figure 1 there is a significant difference between the male and female students in terms of their internal success pertaining to causal attribution of academic achievement in academic contexts. Male students, in general, have a lesser tendency to attribute their academic achievements to internal causes (i.e., own ability to succeed or excel). Female students, however, have a greater tendency to attribute their academic success to their own efforts. It is speculated that differences in social expectations may play a significant role in this difference. Academic expectations may be greater for males than females in that when males succeed academically, the attribution they make to such success may be perceived to be less likely a function of one's own ability or efforts compared to female students. Female students who succeed academically may perceive their achievements largely as a function of their own efforts because there may be less social expectations for them to do so compared to males.

This may also indicate that the male students may be reaching their full academic potential more easily than the female students, who in contrast attributed their success primarily to their own efforts. This outcome appears to be an indication that female students today may be more introspective than males, which may possibly detrimental because this may allow more room for self-criticism and reduced effort to succeed if encountering failure in the classroom.

The findings of this study certainly needs further investigation. Cultural, geographical, and institutional variations may exist. Future investigation may consider increasing sample size, using other assessment tools for control beliefs, and looking at other academic contexts. In addition, the substantial use of male/female/student/ mentor programs should be stressed to minimize the gender gap in academe and in classroom learning in general. Another way to enhance academic success is to encourage professors to gather the data on students' use of motivational strategies in their classes.

[END]

Summary and Implications

This study focuses on the attribution of college students' internal success. It presents data that shows the difference between male and female genders; it points out a significant difference in the perception of their internal success. The feedback it provides can turn out to be a stepping stone for both teachers' and students' scholastic success. Moreover, "researchers who have addressed the situational specificity of attributions have consistently found that standard comparisons elicit attributional tendencies that are characteristic of maladaptive motivation patterns" (e.g., Ames, 1984a: Ames & Ames, 1981).

As you can see from the data there is a substantial difference between the male and female students. This indicates that male subjects have an externally oriented nature attributing their success primarily on whether or not the teaching ability of the program was adequate enough. In this study they did not look to themselves for their success as much as the female students. This also indicates that male students may be reaching their full academic potential more easily than female students. This outcome appears to be an indication that female students today may be more introspective than males, which in turn can hinder them academically since it can allow more room for self-criticism and depression from failure in the classroom. It could also turn out to be a hindrance for them in their personal lives if it

continues on and becomes a pattern. On the other hand it also makes for a catch-22; their self-attribution when succeeding surely becoming part of the reason for their continued success. And since self-attribution would certainly increase their confidence in their ability to succeed, it can also most definitely become the major reason for their scholastic suicide when failing. Moreover, due to the advancement of females over the generations, past female conditions are still being looked at today, this may provoke more of a scholastic emphasis to be placed upon them. This emphasis may very well make for the creation of a female success ideal in our society. It can make success and failure more of a personal issue for them because it inflicts the impression that they must still continue to prove themselves to society as an equal, adequate gender. In 1994 Dr. Gene N. Landrum stated in his book "Profiles of Female Genius, Thirteen Creative Women Who Changed the World" that men and women are different, even if they are great creative geniuses. One of the most obvious differences is based on the way men and women view the world. I am convinced that Anita Hill/Judge Thomas debacle had more to do with gender differences in relational values and attitudes than it had to do with any overt discrimination. Each of these adversaries saw the same issues from his or her own unique perspective based on <u>years of conditioning and gender differences</u>". Gender appears to have little bearing on creative achievement. <u>Hypomania</u>,

competitiveness, risk-taking propensity, and a keen intuitive vision have been found to be the critical variables in both men and women who have achieved great success. Both genders demonstrate these particular traits although to different degrees. Women are more methodical than men and are more prone to analyzing the ramifications of their decisions (pp.403 & 407).

In retrospect an appropriate suggestion, would seem to be that there be substantial use of Male/Female/Student/Mentor programs in schools. These programs should enable one gender to acquire benefits from the qualities of the other, each gender together in a scholastic situation, sharing their goals, experiences, and ways of dealing with things. This would naturally bring about the acquiring of each other's personal tendencies as well as their influence. "Research on creative genius has shown that men need to look important while woman need to look good. To men success is power, and to women success is a strong relationship. Women prefer to communicate; men prefer to intimidate. Women seek interpersonal approval; men seek interpersonal dominance. Women are sensitive to others' feelings; men are sensitive to their egos. Women give sex to get romance; men give romance to get sex. Women will discuss controversy; men will avoid controversy. These differences indicate that men and women approach life from far different perspectives" (Landrum, 1994, p. 407).

Furthermore, another way to enhance academic success would

be to encourage professors to gather the same type of data as gathered in this study from their individual classes. Afterwards, according to the overview of the data, they might encourage students by placing an emphasis on scholastic success as being an overall success attaining process rather than an individual short-term achievement. And as someone once said you can't win them all therefore with students, especially females who have internal attributing tendencies, I believe that more guidance should be given in accepting success modestly and in dealing with failure more positively. I would also encourage them to look to external reasons for success and failure as well as internal ones. These characteristics should be reinforced from time to time, and encouraged as much as possible. After all, this may eventually balance out the tables leaving us with a neatly shaven countertop.

END

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